

Message #2**Acts 16:9-34**

When we first started out in ministry, we went to minister in Demotte, Indiana and one person told me that Demotte, Indiana had more churches in proportion to the number of people than any other city in the United States.

It became interesting to learn how some of those churches began. Some of the churches began because people got mad at each other or had differences and split the church. So they would start their own church. You had first, second, third and fourth Reformed churches. There were first Baptist, general Baptist, American Baptist, Southern Baptist and a Bible Baptist church. There were Lutheran churches, Methodist Churches and various charismatic churches and a hodgepodge of other churches all of which gave claim to the fact that they were a church.

I came to believe that not too many of them were truly there because of the will of God; but were basically there because of the will of men. People who couldn't get along started their own church because they all had their quirky doctrines and personal conflicts.

When we come to the church of Philippi, we do come to a church that was literally planted by God. In fact, the Apostle Paul was not intending to even go to Philippi. Paul wanted to go NE to Bithynia (Acts 16:7), but God would not permit him to go there. So Paul was spending the night in Troas (Acts 16:8) and during the night, he saw a vision of a man from Macedonia who appealed to Paul to go there to preach (**Acts 16:9**). Can you imagine someone in Europe today, who would beg a man of God to come over there and preach God's Word?

Well this vision to go to Macedonia was directly from God and immediately the next day he got on a boat and crossed the Aegean Sea and landed at the port city of Neapolis and then went inland about ten miles to the leading city of the district which was Philippi, and it was there where God established this church (**Acts 16:11-12**). So the Philippian church was a church actually put into existence by God. Man did not do this, God did. This was truly a God-planted church.

Now understanding the historical background of this city and church is crucial because this is the place where God planted one of His great churches. So we would like to ask and answer key historical questions concerning Philippi.

HISTORICAL QUESTION #1 – Where was Philippi located?

It is very clear from **Acts 16:9, 10, 12** and **Philippians 4:15** that Philippi was located in Macedonia.

Macedonia was a kingdom whose boundaries have varied over the centuries. It was a very fertile territory possessing mountains, rivers, plains and ocean ports. It was located just north of Greece and **is part of Europe**. So we have a real connection to this Philippian church because the gospel came to us out of Europe and this all started from the church of Philippi.

HISTORICAL QUESTION #2 – What is the historical background of Philippi?

Philippi is a well-known city in history. In fact, from 1914 until 1937 and beyond both French and Greek archeological scholars excavated this very city. The city was impressive. It had a public forum, gymnasiums, baths, library and many religious temples.

In 360 B.C., Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, became the political leader of Macedonia. The residents of Philippi contacted him and asked him for military help. He decided to help and he conquered key cities of the region and one of the cities he conquered was a city named “Krenides/Crenides” which means little fountains, because of the many surrounding mountain springs that actually flowed into the city.

There was a great road that ran through this city called the “Via Ignatia.” It ran between Europe and Asia and eventually it became the main east-west road of the Roman Empire. Since Philippi was surrounded by mountains, this was a very strategic city and Philip made it his city.

Philip was so impressed with this city that he decided to change the name and name it after himself. So in **356 B.C.**, Philip renamed the city “Philippi.” In Philip’s time, the city was rich in gold, but the mines eventually were tapped out and the city lost some of its luster. However, this city remained a major commercial city as **Acts 16:12** says, it was the “leading city” or “first city” of Macedonia.

In 336 B.C., his son, Alexander the Great, succeeded his father and he combined Macedonia, Greece and the east into a vast empire. Alexander made this city the “showcase city” of Greece. Alexander died in 323 B.C. and the Empire was divided to four of his generals. Now Daniel predicted this (Dan. 11:3-4), so Philippi was in the prophetic bull’s eye of the sovereignty of God even back in the days of Daniel.

In **217 B.C.** a series of wars broke out with Rome and Macedonia and Greece was conquered by Rome. **Then, in 167 B.C., Philippi became a city under Roman control.** The city was located about 800 miles from Rome. It became an important city. Now Philippi was a great city and two Roman generals wanted it and this became a major focal point of a war.

In **42 B.C.** there was a battle fought “the Battle of Philippi.” Brutus and Cassius, who have been called “the assassins of Julius Caesar,” were defeated by Octavian and Mark Antony. In fact, it was this very battle that led to the assassination of Julius Caesar. In Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Caesar warns Brutus that he will see him in Philippi. **The result was that Philippi became a major Roman military city.**

In **31 B.C.**, Octavian defeated Mark Antony in the “Battle of Actium” and took the title Caesar Augustus, and he developed Philippi into a military outpost to guard this part of the Empire. Many Roman army veterans made Philippi their home.

Now cities were either municipals or colonies. Colonies were little Rome's that answered directly to the Roman Emperor. **A colony was a city controlled by Rome, whereas a municipal was a city controlled by the residents of the city.** Colonies featured transplanted Roman citizens and soldiers; they used Roman coinage and the citizens had full Roman rites that included protection, ownership of property and the right to legal appeal. Roman citizens were immune from certain taxes. **Paul is very clear to point out that Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12).** This was a very Gentile city. William Larkin said Philippi "was the closest thing to preaching in Rome without actually being there" (*Acts*, p. 235).

Now if we look at this city where God called Paul to go and where God decided to establish a church, we certainly can see why God wanted a church planted here. This church would become the first church in European history. But here is the thing. Today, Philippi does not even exist. It is nothing but excavated ruins.

What we conclude from this is the thing that makes something historically significant is the Word of God and the church of God. Without God, it ends up nothing. It doesn't matter how impressive something appears to be, without God in it, it is zero and it ends up zero.

HISTORICAL QUESTION #3 – How did God plant this church in Philippi?

God used Paul to plant His church in this city in a very unusual way. In A.D. 51, God gave Paul a vision to go to this place and preach the Gospel (**Acts 16:10-12**). Paul was not looking to go there; but this is where God wanted him to go. We learn five key facts about what happened:

Fact #1 - Paul and his team stayed in the city several days. **Acts 16:12b**

Paul walked into the city and he spent several days in Philippi. What is interesting about this visit is that there wasn't much positive that initially took place. But Paul was not the kind of man who would run or quit and eventually God established one of the great churches there.

Fact #2 - On the Sabbath Day, Paul and his team went outside the city and spoke with some women. **Acts 16:13**

Now the Jewish customs featured many different purification rituals and water was needed for those rituals so Paul decided to take Silas, Timothy and Luke and they went to some riverside spot where they thought some of the Jewish people would be. The river was probably the Gangites River and it is speculated that this spot was located 1 ½ miles outside the city. When they got there the only people who came were the women.

What is so ironic is that Paul received a vision from a man to go to Macedonia and when Paul gets to Macedonia, God starts first saving women. This must have been somewhat of a shock because a man called him to Macedonia but when he gets there he only finds women.

God does things His way. We follow His leading and we just don't know how it will all play out. Women would become critical to this church. Lydia, the slave girl, and Euodia, and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2), would become the backbone of this church.

Take an honest look at this text because the gospel that would eventually come to us started by saving women, not men. Had it not been for these women, there would not have been a Philippian church. Almost all religions of the world degrade women, but Biblical Christianity exalts them.

Fact #3 - God started the Philippian church by initially saving one woman. **Acts 16:14-15**

There was one special woman God immediately saved. There are seven truths we learn about this woman:

(Truth #1) - The woman's name was Lydia. **Acts 16:14a**

(Truth #2) - The woman was from Thyatira. **Acts 16:14b**

Thyatira was a rich commercial city in Asia, which eventually would have a church in it (Rev. 2:18-29). Remember this is where Paul originally wanted to go, but God called him to Macedonia and the first person saved was an Asian.

(Truth #3) - The woman was a seller of purple. **Acts 16:14c**

Thyatira was a rich manufacturer of dyed goods. Lydia dealt with high quality material. She was a business woman with probably a very wealthy clientele.

(Truth #4) - The woman was a worshipper of God. **Acts 16:14d**

The name "Lydia" was a Roman and Greek name. So we conclude that she was a Gentile woman but she was interested in worshipping the true God of the Bible.

(Truth #5) - The woman's heart was opened by the Lord. **Acts 16:14e**

This is such an important doctrinal point; individuals are saved not by them opening their hearts, but by God opening their hearts. She was not saved by Paul opening her heart, but by God opening her heart. Paul's view of salvation was "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Paul did not believe that he reasoned someone or outsmarted someone to salvation. He believed that God saved people. The beginning of the Philippian church starts right here with God opening this woman's heart.

(Truth #6) - The woman's family all came to faith in Christ. **Acts 16:15a**

What we learn here is that her faith impacted her entire family. Not only did she come to faith in Christ, but so did her whole family. God opened all their hearts and they all believed.

(Truth #7) - The woman invited Paul and his team to stay at her home. **Acts 16:15b**

Lydia obviously lived in a very palatial home and she put the pressure on Paul and his team to stay in her home. She strongly appealed to Paul and his team to stay, which they did.

Fact #4 - God started the Philippian church by using a satanic woman. **Acts 16:16-24**

Now Paul and his team would apparently go to this prayer spot by the river on a regular daily basis (**16:16**) and a demon-possessed slave girl was tracking them for several days crying out that "these men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation" (**16:17**).

Now you would tend to naturally think this would be a good thing because this was the truth and Paul could use her to help communicate this to the unsaved demonic crowd. God does not use or need unclean people to do anything sacred, even when that person is communicating truth.

This woman greatly annoyed Paul. There are some women who are a blessing and some who are an annoyance. This woman was an annoyance to Paul. In fact, only Paul apparently could see she was demon-possessed. Paul turned to her and commanded in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her and the demon did (**16:18**).

The problem was the masters lost their profit maker. These wealthy businessmen just lost their income so they got together with the key politicians of Philippi and they ended up beating Paul and Silas up pretty bad and throwing them in jail and they fastened their feet in stocks (**16:19-24**).

Now you really don't expect this to be part of your church planting strategy. You are falsely accused, beaten badly and locked up in jail. But in this very context, God would greatly impact this Philippian church.

Fact #5 - God started the Philippian church by saving a Philippian jailer. **16:25-34**

Now about midnight, Paul and Silas decided to put on a sacred concert and they started singing "hymns" and all the prisoners were listening to them sing (**16:25**). As they are singing a great earthquake starts shaking the prison and all the doors of the prison were opened and all the chains were unfastened (**16:26**).

Now if a prisoner escaped under Roman law, the jailer or warden was executed. When the jailer woke up and saw the doors opened, he decided to kill himself rather than be executed in some of the horrible ways Rome did it (**16:27**).

According to **verse 28**, Paul told him not do to that because they were all there. According to **verse 29**, he called for the lights and he saw they were all there and he fell down before Paul and Silas and he brought them out of prison and asked them “what must I do to be saved?” (**16:30**).

These are seven of the most critical English words anyone can ask and thank God you have Paul there to answer the question. Paul is the man who understands pure grace and he knows the answer to that question.

Now had many people been asked this question, here is probably what you would have heard:

You don't need to be saved from anything; you are just as good as everyone else.

Well to be saved, you need to join our religious organization and follow our rules.

Well to be saved, you need to repent of sin and confess and make some public profession.

Well to be saved, you need to be baptized.

Well to be saved, you need to try to obey the ten commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.

Well to be saved, you need to be a good neighbor and try hard and be as good as you can.

Well to be saved, you are going to need to give up everything and follow the Lord and be

His disciple.

Paul did not say anything like that. Praise God he knew grace because when he was asked what he must do, his answer was “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (**v. 31**).

The church in Europe was founded on this simple message. Place all of your trust and faith in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins and you will be saved.

This Philippians jailer took Paul and Silas to his own home and they spoke the Word of God to everyone in the home. The jailer fed them and they rejoiced and they believed him and his entire household (**v. 33-34**).

J. B. Lightfoot said this church began by God saving a successful Asian business woman; a Greek slave girl and Roman soldier (*Philippians*, pp. 65-66). That is what the gospel does. It saves all kinds of people who have been involved in all kinds of lifestyles and sins.

Here is the beginning of the great Philippian church. In verses 35-40 Paul reveals to them that he is a Roman citizen and they begged Paul to leave Philippi (16:39). Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke stayed for a while at Lydia's and then left the city. But the church had been formed and this would be the church to which Paul would write his great letter of Philippians ten years later.

Now the message that Paul preached was “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” But, in Philippi, there were “enemies of the cross” (Philippians 3:18). Many were promoting a law-keeping works religion and not the grace gospel.

But the grace gospel says this—no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter what your background, you may believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.